



GUITAR BASICS



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Way back in 1991, when I was still in high school, a friend of mine took me to a punk show. It was in downtown Olympia, an all-ages mess at the Capitol Theater. That was it. I was hooked. I begged my parents to let me play electric guitar and they caved, presenting me with a cherry red music 6000 special- complete with whammy bar and pointy metal headstock. I loved it. I couldn't figure out quite what to do with it at first... I would hang out in the basement and make awful cacophonous sounds and bang away at whatever out-of-tune riff I could mangle my way through. But I loved it. I didn't know the names of the strings or how to read music or play cool cover songs- I just wanted to make noise. And it became powerful noise, growing bigger and bigger everyday that I kept playing. I spent a lot of time alone in my bedroom for the next few years, sorting out just what exactly I wanted to get from this thing, a guitar. Things started to work, come together, sound right--slowly at first, and then faster and faster and faster. And everything that I never learned, all those little things that I know now, the special tricks and hints.. now they're yours for the taking: run with it.

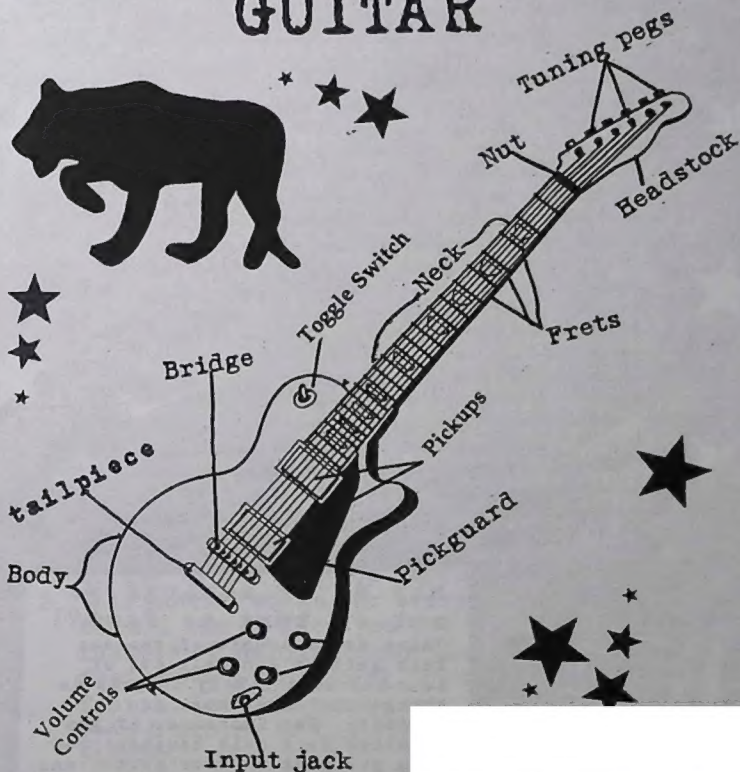
xoxo



Sarah
U.

FIRST THINGS FIRST- GET TO KNOW YOUR
PARTS:

ANATOMY OF THE GUITAR



Tip:

Instead of spending \$\$\$ on those locking guitar strap mechanisms, go visit the plumbing department at a hardware store. Pick up a couple of rubber washers that are roughly the size of a quarter. Slip them over your strap and voila! Your strap is totally secure for about a dollar.

STRINGS:

What are they called, and why do they always BREAK?!

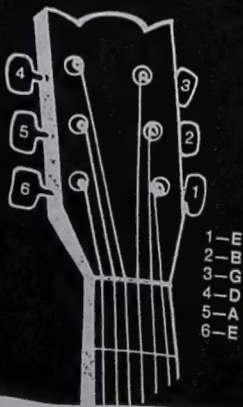
From thickest to thinnest, the strings on a guitar are E,A,D,G,B,E. I used to always forget the order, until this girl told me to repeat 'Every Acid Dealer Gets Busted Eventually'.

So true. And a good way to remember your strings.

I am constantly breaking strings when I play shows. I break them even when I'm sitting on the couch playing quietly. I think it has to do with the way I tend to bend the notes, or maybe cuz I'm kind of heavy-handed with the pick, meaning I tend to come down hard on the strings instead of strumming gently. Everyone has they're own style. But one thing you can definitely do to prolong the life of your strings is to wipe them down with a clean cloth when you are done playing. The oils on your fingers, combined with sweat and moisture in the air, can corrode your strings and cause them to break way faster than they should. You can even get special 'string cleaner' at the music store, which is probably useful, but even just getting a soft chamois to wipe off the neck will definitely add life to the strings.

Why do my strings go out of tune so fast?!

There are a couple of reasons that guitars can fall out of tune-the most likely culprit is change in temperature or humidity. For instance, if you practice in a cold basement and then you pack up your guitar and take it to a sweaty punk club, the shift in temperature causes expansion/contraction, making the act of tuning somewhat frustrating. The second reason for strings falling out of tune is crappy tuning pegs- sometimes even really nice guitars come with stock tuning pegs that are kind of worthless. Investing in some quality tuning pegs can make a world of difference!



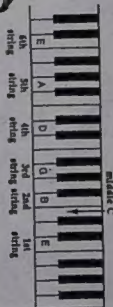
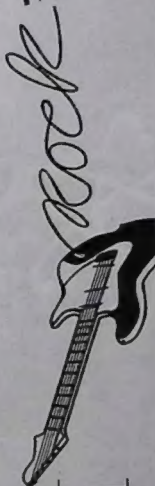
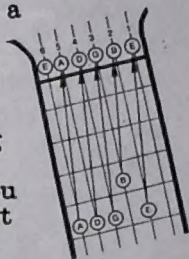
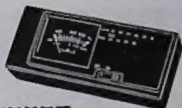
NOW YOU'RE READY TO GET IN TUNE!

Tuning your guitar correctly is verrrrrry important. I like to use a pedal-style tuner, its easy and fast and failsafe.. you can buy one for around \$50, and it's a great investment. Pedal tuners are an absolute must if you play in a band, as you can tune quickly on stage while at the same time use the pedal to mute the usually irksome sounds of strings being wound and unwound. But if you're just jamming by yourself in your bedroom, you can learn to quickly tune by ear without a pedal. Here's one method:

1. Hold the low E string (the thickest one) down with your finger on the fifth fret. Let the note ring out. As it rings, play the string next to it (A) open. Using the tuning peg, fiddle around with the A string until the two notes sound exactly the same.
2. Now do the same thing with the A string. Play the A string with your finger on the fifth fret. Let the note ring out. As it rings, play the next string (D) open. Match the open string to the ringing string.
3. This method works for every string EXCEPT the G. When you get to G, instead of holding down the fifth fret, move your finger down to the fourth. Let this note ring. Match the open B string to the ringing G string.

Now you're in tune- sweet!

P.S. Besides 'standard' tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E), there are lots of other interesting ways to tune.. one of my favorites is D-A-D-G-A-D. It's called an 'open tuning' and almost everytime you put your finger down on any string you sound like a total genius! You should try it, it's totally fun.

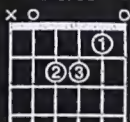




CHORDS

Here are some easy 'open chords' to learn:

Am



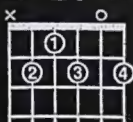
A



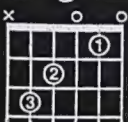
A7



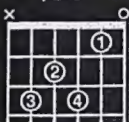
B7



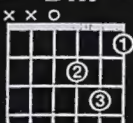
C



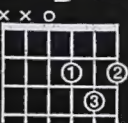
C7



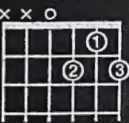
Dm



D



D7



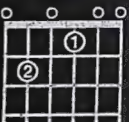
Em



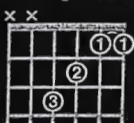
E



E7



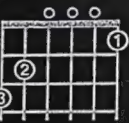
F



G



G7



You can go online and learn a million more.. here are some handy websites:

www.chordfind.com

www.guitarnotes.com/guitar/notes2/ultimatell.shtml

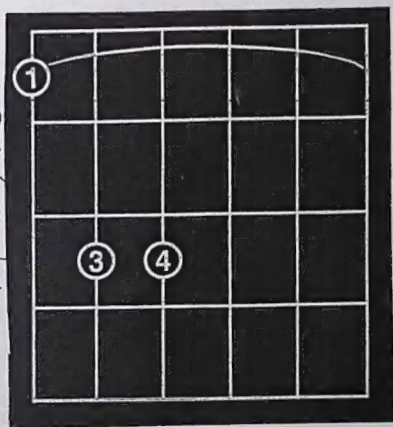
www.all-guitar-chords.com

I have really small hands. Sometimes when I'm trying to play chords I feel like my fingers are barely reaching all the strings. That's why they invented:

POWER CHORDS

Power chords are a staple of most rock n'roll and punk songs. They're fast and easy and only require two fingers, three if you wanna get fancy. Check it out:

ROCK

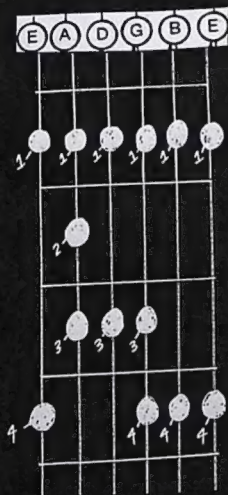


A good way to practice power chords is to play along with records. I recommend the Ramones, or Joan Jett. Now you can play anything!



SCALES AND SOLOS

The idea of 'soloing' can be really intimidating and conjure up all sorts of bad mental images of dudes with big hair wearing spandex. But it isn't all bad. Lots of great soul songs and punk songs and old blues songs have really nice solos. A 'solo' is basically a string of single notes pieced together in a harmonious or interesting way.. an easy way to get your fingers learning how to play solos is to practice a basic blues scale.. try this one:



Keep practicing, and learn more scales. Grab a book from the library, or get online. Here's something really important to remember: anything you can do slow, you can eventually do faster. Learn the scale slowly. Play it backwards and forwards. Play it with your eyes closed. Play it laying down on your floor. Try playing the notes out of order and make up new combinations.

FANCY-PANTS TRICKS

Now that you've got the whole soloing thing in the works, try adding some interesting accents to the notes.. how about:

BENDING STRINGS:

It's easiest (for me at least) to bend strings using my third finger. Try using your third finger to play a single note on the G string.. push the string in towards your body, or pull it away from yourself. You're basically pulling the note up a little bit sharper, listen to the way it changes the sound. I am addicted to bending strings!



HAMMER-ONS:

Bear with me here... like soloing, hammer-ons have gotten a bad rap. But they're really fun to do, and a good way to get your fingers moving. All you have to do is hit the fret really hard with your finger, instead of using a pick to get a sound. The opposite of a hammer-on is a 'pull-off' or 'pick-off'. Do a hammer-on, and let the note ring out for a second. Then pull your finger off of the string while kind of giving it a little pluck. This is much better explained visually, but you get the idea.



SLIDING:

Try getting to the note you want to play by starting a fret lower and then sliding your finger up. Or start a couple frets higher and slide down. So fancy!



MUTING AND MUFFLING:

I use this usually in conjunction with power chords. It's a great way to change up the sound, add drama to a part, or make your guitar 'crunchier'. Play a power chord, and kind-of let the side of your picking hand rest on top of the strings. It's a little tricky at first, but the more you practice the easier it'll get!



BUYING EQUIPMENT

Buying your first guitar can be a little overwhelming.. there are so many options. Music stores. Classifieds. Ebay. Pawnshops. I think it's really important to try out lots of different kinds of guitars to see what feels and sounds right to you, rather than just buying a certain kind because someone you like plays one. For instance, the weight of a guitar changes drastically from model to model. Gibson SG's are pretty light while Gibson Les Pauls are super heavy. The width of the neck varies from guitar to guitar, and if you have smaller hands you want to get something you can easily get your fingers around. Go to a music store, and take a friend. Ask to play lots of different kinds. More expensive doesn't always necessarily mean better, but buying a super cheap guitar can also be hindering. Sometimes the really really inexpensive ones are harder to play, more difficult to get strings to press to the frets, etc. Try on each guitar and see how it feels on your body. Don't let those 'Guitar Dudes' that work at shops intimidate you. If you're buying a used guitar, switch the pickup selector back and forth to make sure all the settings work. Jiggle the input jack to listen for loose connections. Play it hard and see if stays in tune. Hold the guitar up to eye level and look down the neck, making sure it's straight and not warped. I like guitars that already have a few nicks and scratches, that way if I drop it or bang it or whatever, its not such a big deal!

MOST IMPORTANTLY:

Give yourself time. Rock out. Don't worry about being super good. Make mistakes. Play loud. Start slow and get faster. Find friends to play with. Go to shows. Listen to records. Make a band. Don't make a band. Write your own songs. Get crazy. Have fun!

